

[Mining Life in Oregon]

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Title Mining life in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest

Place of origin Oreg. Date 12/9/38

Project worker Walker Winslow

Project editor

Remarks (over)

Form A

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Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Walker Winslow Date December 9, 1938.

Address 2069 SW Park

Subject Mining Life in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

Name and address of informant William Huntley Hampton 2037 SW Park, Portland, Oregon.

Date and time of interview Afternoon.

Place of interview Home of Mr. Hampton

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

Miss Nettle Spencer, 2071 SW Park, Portland.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None.

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Mr. Hampton lives alone in a large two story houses which he owns. It is a dwelling that was fashionable in the early century and has been kept in good repair and has a well kept yard surrounded with a hedge. Mr. Hampton, in order to simplify his life, has cut off most of the house and lives in two rear rooms, a bedroom, and the kitchen, which he has also made into a study and workroom. It was there I interviewed the gentleman. The kitchen is a large one and has a cook stove

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which serves as a heating stove also. Close by it is the drawing board of the engineer and across from that another large work table, and a small table with a typewriter on it. There is a place for everything, and the wood is stacked so neatly one would think it was on exhibit. There are only two chairs in the room and a filing cabinet. A door opening into the rest of the house is kept ajar for ventilation. Everything is very 2 clean. The rest of the house is a sort of a museum and in it Mr. Hampton keeps his photographs, records, periodicals and bulletins, as well as mineral samples and models of mining machinery. He says that he has a ton and a half of mineral samples in the basement. I didn't see the upper story of the house.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Walker Winslow Date December 9, 1938

Address 2069 SW Park

Subject Mining Life in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

Name and address of informant William Huntley Hampton, 2037 SW Park, Portland, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry

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2. Place and date of birth

3. Family

4. Places lived in, with dates

5. Education, with dates

6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

1. Son of Brigham Young & Helen Emily Huntley (Boone) Hampton, of Salt Lake City, Utah. Non-committal about Brigham Young, but had a step-father, Joshua Elliot Clayton, who came from Georgia to the gold rush in California, during the 'fifties. Mother was of titled English stock on one side, and was a Boone on the other. Clayton was quite a famous engineer.

2. Salt Lake City, Utah, February 9, 1866.

3. Given in ancestry, except for a childless marriage to [?] Jane Leslie of Portland, Oregon in 1892.

4. Left Utah quite young and followed step-father through mining camps, except for period of education. As a mining engineer Mr. Hampton moved about quite a bit. Held chair of chemistry at Willamette University, 1885-86; Portland for next few years, as consulting engineer and assayer. Traveled through the Northwest as representative of Bureau of

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Mines, 1889-93. Part owner and manager 2 of Columbia Mines, at Placer, Oregon, for six years (also postmaster). Construction engineer with Oregon & California Railroad, for time United States Survey, California 1902. Alaska till 1905. Chief Engineer and manager Alaska Pacific Terminal Railroad Company 1906-12. Member of firm of Florence & Hampton, mining and construction engineers, New York City, 1912-1916 (charge). Gas defense apparatus, Long Island laboratories; Representative Gas Defense Division United States Army, 1918-19. Now living in semi-retirement in Portland. Is doing work with oil shale etc.

5. Common schools, Salt Lake City, St. Marks High School & Deseret University (Chemistry and Engineering).

6. Mining and construction engineer; inventor, mineralogist, specialist in oil shales and dam construction.

7. Covered in 4 and 6.

8. Republican and Episcopalian. Member of many engineering organizations. Associate American Museum of Natural History. Member National Geographic Society.

9. Mr. Hampton is a man of orderly and dignified bearing; smooth shaven, good even teeth and kindly face. He has a little infirmity in the limbs but it does not seem to bother his disposition, and he talks with an evenly modulated voice and in excellent English. Obviously a man of even and clean habits, but not a bigot. One could say that he is an extraordinarily well-balanced individual, who wears his years with grace and dignity and finds the world entertaining.

10. Mr. Hampton is very cooperative and has a fine collection of photographs of early mining activities, which he would allow to be copied. Also he has any amount of minerals and mining documents that might be of value. Most of his 3 step-father's papers are preserved, as well as his own. Says he has the only complete record of the Alaska

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Railroad, a point that might be of interest to the Territory of Alaska Writers' Project. Will cooperate in every way that will help with the work we are doing, and although he is not what could be called a good folklore source, he could be valuable in many other ways, especially in connection with mining.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

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Address 2069 SW Park

Subject Mining Life in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

Name and address of informant William Huntley Hampton 2037 SW Park, Portland.

Text:

You can get what biographical material you need from Who's Who in Engineering, but remember that, in spite of my ancestry I am not, as Lockley (Oregon-Journal) wrongly insisted in a recent write-up he gave me, a Mormon. I was christened in the Episcopal Church. I am afraid that I can't be much help on folklore, but I can tell you what you want to know about mining, and if you will pick a specific subject and prepare your questions I will answer them to the best of my ability. I had something to do with Oregon mining and my step-father was one of the leading mining engineers of the West. He was a man who never went to school a day in his life and yet he was the best engineer, office and field, I have

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ever known. I learned more from him by accident than I did from the university by design. He was a noted authority on Apex suits, and as such was called to most of the big mines in the West. He was known as the man who founded Butte, Montana, and I doubt that but for the advice he gave Read on the Bunker Bill and Sullivan mines, Reed College would exist today. That is a long story, but when the Reed estate had some litigation over the mine they had to get the records that my step-dad had preserved, and copy them in order to win their case. I have the papers here. You are probably more interested in Oregon mining, so we will talk about that and return to the old man later.

2

Most of the gold in Oregon has been taken by a man with a gun and dog. I mean that it has been individual enterprise. Most of our mining won't stand the cost of industrial investment, and it has been singularly hard to get anyone to invest in legitimate mining. The wildcatters have done well, however. Mining doesn't work on a pay as you go basis unless you have some extraordinary property, and most of the surface gold that would allow that was taken long ago. I operated at Placer, Oregon, in the 'nineties, on an almost pay-as-you-go basis. But that was placer, and as soon as we got a ways from our water we were up against investment to get our original investment out of the ground. That is usually the story of the shoe-string mining. We finally had to sell some of our best property to the Greenback Company, and since they had money they cashed in on our work. I was their superintendent, and so you see it wasn't a matter of what you know or didn't know. I was postmaster at Placer for six years. We had about a hundred men and ten or twelve families with us most of the time. They were migratory miners, most of them, I was too busy working to know or care much about their folkways. I think they went to church and I know a good percentage got drunk on Saturdays, and spent their money. If they didn't they wouldn't have stayed with us long. There were lots of good miners and they kept moving. Drink and gambling was all that held most of them on a job, unless they had families, which some of them did. Sometimes Placer would get up to four or five hundred men, and we always took care of them in one way and another, or they took care of themselves.

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Surface gold provided a sort of relief. They couldn't do that now for the country has been cleaned of that sort of pickings. Anyone who thinks that man could be thrown back on the country that way is insane. I am not like some of the old-timers. I realize too well the problem the country is faced with. We need new industries, and there can be no new industries, as I will show you later.

3

After I left Placer I was a census-taker for the Bureau of Mines, and covered the entire Northwest. I couldn't go into any details about that, unless you gave me something specific to work on. I was in Sumpter, and my step-father did the Apex work on the Eureka Excelsior, for Jonathon Bourne. What happened to the mines around Sumpter is typical of the West. After Bourne worked it for a while and took out considerable gold, he sold it to the Longmaids, who were from Utah, not Montana. The Longmaids were highgraders. They knew good property and how to get out all of the rich croppings with a minimum of cost. That way they would kill a mine. There would be lots of gold left but it would be scattered until it didn't pay to mine it. Then they would sell. Thirty million were sunk back in that mine by the people who came after the Longmaids. There is a narrow margin between profit and loss in mining, and both can be great. Probably at the present price of gold that thirty million investment would have shown a profit. You see with mining you haven't any capital investment after you clean the ground, and so your profit has to pay back your capital. Coal, copper, iron, etc., have an investment value where gold and oil haven't. That is why you see the big corporations in one, and the poor little sucker buying stock in the latter. Take oil: very few of the big companies tap a field. They let the little man take the chances. They know his find isn't worth a damn until they buy it and they buy it at the price they have set, put in a pipe line and draw off the certain profits. It is that way with gold too. A man, or a bunch of small stockholders develop a property and then they have to turn it over to someone like the Longmaids, who have the money for big operations.

I'll sound like a crank when I tell you this, but I have the patent on a process that could make a staple industry out of oil. We only have a certain amount of oil to pump out easily,

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and then it is gone. Until it is gone there is 4 an enormous profit in it. You can get oil from oil shale, coal, peat, etc. I operated a plant in Pennsylvania and could produce oil for a profit at the present price, but the oil companies, aren't interested yet, because of their holdings in well oil. (Here Mr. Hampton showed me samples and told me how the process worked. It is too technical to go into, but he is putting in a pilot plant in the back of his home). My discovery is simple and has only been overlooked because it has never been needed. One or two tried it before me and only failed by a margin. All I did was add a few degrees of heat and break the shale smaller. There will be no need of this country running out of oil and the oil industry will employ many more men when the well oil goes. It will mean developing large shale and coal fields, and the return to labor will be much greater than it is now.

Oregon isn't particularly blessed with coal. There are some good fields in the Coos Bay region. In fact they used to supply the railroads with most of their coal and San Francisco with a good portion of its coal. I was an engineer there for a time. You asked about beach mining. Coos Bay is a good region for that. The Old Pioneer Company took a million dollars out of the black sand there. There is still good pickings for a dredge and the dunes have streaks in them that whorl in near the bottom. I have never made much of an investigation of it, but I would say that it would be fairly safe business to work some of them. There is platinum too, but not in large quantities. I had an ounce or two of it around, but I don't know what happened to it. You find it in grains, bigger than the gold. I think that it was closer to the surface and eroded away before the gold. No doubt there is a lot of it off-shore but it would cost a lot to explore for it.

Yes, I have been all over the old Sailor's Diggings. Senator Reames owns them now, and Earl Nickerson, the State Geologist, has a mine there. I discovered a new mineral on Josephine creek; Josephinite — an alloy. It doesn't amount to 5 much but it sounds good. Iron and nickel. There is a good deal of quicksilver in that country and it will be worked some day. Gold is all right as an incentive for discovery, but it is the other metals that have the true economic value. You are learning to get along without gold aren't you? Try to get

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along without steel, etc. I will be willing to help you in any way I can, but I am afraid that you will have to give me something to go on.

(In speaking of the dams he is now studying, Mr. Hampton said that Boulder Dam had more stresses and strains than a boy with a belly full of green apples).

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

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Name and address of informant William Huntley Hampton.

Comment:

Mr. Hampton is a potential source for the Historical Records Survey, and also for Mr. Bright, on ghost towns. His collection of records and photos should be examined. It might pay to find out if Alaska needs any of the material he has, or Utah. Obviously several states would have to collaborate, to get the full value of his experiences. He is an amiable man and eager to be of assistance if what he has is of any value.

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I spent several hours with Mr. Hampton and he was kind enough to show me most of his collection of pictures and so on. He has made a hobby of dam failures recently, and has an extraordinary collection of data and material on the subject. I am going to lead lightly up to the subject of getting one of the organizations with which he is connected to sponsor a book. This will take a good deal of tact, I don't think he should be ganged up on at once.